

# A Little Salad with Your Night Crawlers, Sir?

BY ARTHUR BLACK

**S**o the story, as I understand it, goes like this. A teacher in Ottawa is in hot water because he feeds worms to

his class. He didn't force or trick them to eat worms. The parents were informed by letter. The kids were allowed to make up their own minds whether to chow down or not. The worms were clean and chemical-free and tastefully presented—boiled for just a few minutes and served with lemon wedges.

So what's the fuss? It's not the first time wiggly squigglys have passed human lips. Ask Rusty Rice of Rialto College, California. Rusty holds the world title for worm eating, having forked up twenty-eight of the critters at a sitting a few years back. Not the first time worms have figured in haute cuisine, either. The top prize winner in a cooking competition, not too long ago, was a recipe for Earthworm Applesauce Surprise Cake. I don't think it entirely spoils the story to know that the competition was sponsored by the North American Bait Company.

Listen—strip worms of their stereotype and they're kind of attractive foodwise. They're boneless. You don't have to pluck them. Or scale or de-talon or flense, fillet, or stuff them. And before you wrinkle your nose and go GAAAAAH!, take a look at North America's Menu du Jour.

We belong to a culture that thinks nothing of taking great ugly under-water behemoths that look like leftovers from a space horror movie—lobsters, I'm talking about—plopping them on a plate, then dismantling them right there on the dinner table. We are a people that boil up and nibble at the artichoke, a treacherous, mind-numbing foodstuff, the eating of which is about as much fun as licking eleven hundred stamps in a row. We eat parsley, which Ogden Nash pronounced gharsley. Rightly, I think.

And broccoli. Which is perhaps the one subject on which George Bush and I agree. Me, George, and Roy Blount Junior, actually. Mister Blount wrote a broccoli song once, the lyrics of which go: "The neighbourhood stores are all out of broccoli. Loccoli."

And what about oysters? What can you say about an assemblage of tastebuds that would lever a homely old oyster out of the seabed wrack and muck, winkle its barnacle-crust shell open, and crow, "Hot dog! A brand new taste sensation!" When it comes to oysters, I'm with Miss Piggy, who once sniffed: "I simply cannot imagine why anyone would eat something slimy served on an ashtray."

Oh, I know there are a lot of oyster lovers out there, and that's fine. A lot of folks, believe it or not, find my favourite sandwich—peanut butter, marmalade, sliced Spanish onion with a light sprinkling of Worcestershire sauce—unpalatable. That's fine, too. There's no accounting for human taste. We just have to be careful about turning up our noses when new food ideas like, well, worms, come along. After all, the food fad of the eighties was sushi. Uncooked fish.

A Mexican comedian once told his English-speaking audience. "Down in Mexico we have a word for sushi. Bait." Which, when you think about the kids eating worms in Ottawa, kind of brings us full circle, doesn't it?